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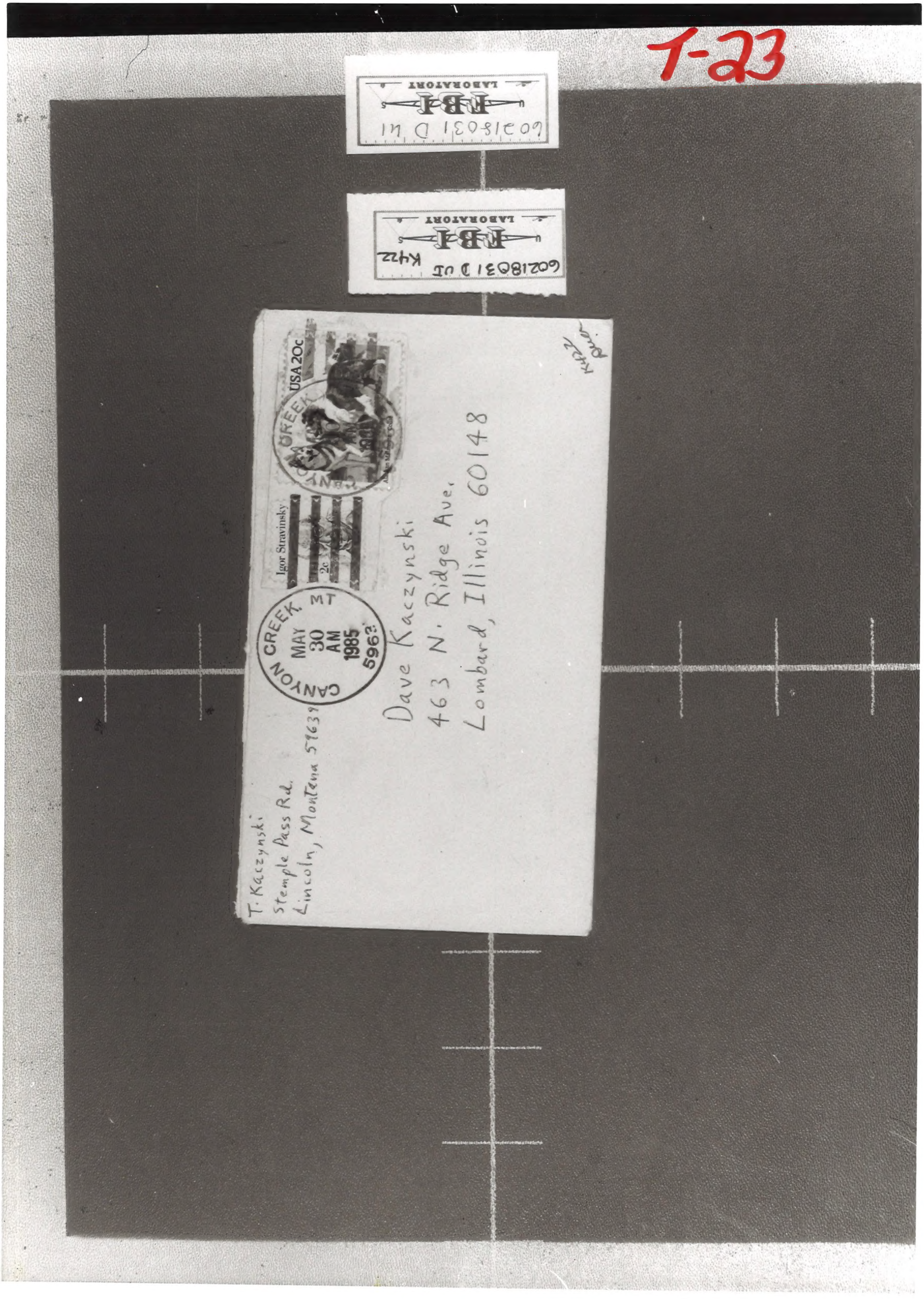

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Dear Dave:

I talked to the local doctor here about what immunizations are recommended for a trip to Mexico. He says it is "his understanding that" no immunizations are recommended for Mexico beyond the ones most North Americans have already as a matter of routine. He said the stuff you have to worry about in Mexico is stuff you can't be immunized against, namely, various intestinal infestations. There's Montezuma's Revenge, of course, but he says the main thing you have to worry about as being really dangerous is amoebic dysentery. Not only is amoebic dysentery difficult to get rid of in the guts; he says you run the risk of "amoebic cysts" (whatever those are) in the liver or the brain, which, I take it, is a very serious matter. He says the diseases you have to worry about catching in Mexico (apart from the kind of stuff we have equally in the U.S.) is "almost exclusively" stuff that is transmitted in food or water. So you should use exclusively bottled water, or else boil your own water in Mexico.

So, if you don't mind, we won't eat in any restaurants in Mexico, but will cook our own food. Is this OK with you? I'm not particularly anxious to have any amoebic cysts in my liver.

I hope we won't run into any situations where we have to offend Mexicans by declining to eat Mexican food. When I talked to Nerpel a few years ago,

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he told me he and his wife had hitch-hiked all the way down to El Salvador. (This was before the war there of course.) He said that on the first occasion when he and his wife ate in a Mexican cafe, they were sitting there debating whether to eat the stuff, and apparently were not sufficiently tactful to adequately conceal their doubts, because a big Mexican about 6 feet tall came up to them and said in excellent English: "This is Mexican food. It is good food. Eat it!" (With an implied or else.) They ate it, and according to Nerpel it was good food. He said he never had any trouble with Montezuma's revenge, but that Karen had constant trouble with it all the way.

If we run into a situation where we can't avoid revealing to Mexicans our doubts about their food or water, possibly I can avoid offense by telling them that I am reluctant to drink from the public water supply also in the cities near where I live in the U.S. Actually this is quite true. Some of the towns around here have been having trouble with a microorganism called "giardia" getting into the water supply. this organism is supposed to be related to "Montezuma's Revenge" and it has a very nasty effect on the guts. Some woman tried to sue the city of Missoula because she got sick with this stuff from drinking Missoula tap-water, but I don't know what the outcome of it was.

This doctor, by the way, told me some interesting things about immunizations. He claims enthusiasm for immunizations is waning because

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of disagreeable side-effects from some of these things. I'd told him I was due for a tetanus shot because I hadn't had one for 7 years. He said public health depts. now recommend them only once every 10 years, and he also gave it as his opinion that public health depts. recommend too many rather than too few immunizations. Apparently he would recommend tetanus shots less often than once every ten years, and in fact he went so far as to say that "nobody needs a tetanus shot" because the desease can now be effectively controlled. He says there have been cases of very severe allergic ~~react~~ reactions to tetanus shots, and furthermore he says that because the shots were given too often there have been cases where a person's entire deltoid muscle has died from tetanus injections. He says he's seen this twice in his own practice.

I asked him about polio immunizations, and he says the Sabin oral vaccine (I think this is the one we had, no?) is now recommended once every ten years by public health depts., but he doesn't recommend it. He says he wouldn't take the stuff himself. He says it's an "attenuated live virus" vaccine, and occasionally they fuck up and don't attenuate it quite enough and somebody gets polio from it. Also, he said that anyone immunized with this stuff thereafter "sheds" polio virus for 3 months and so can give the disease to other people. If you ever take that stuff, be sure to tell me, so I can keep away from you for 3 months. He says that of course if there were polio going around, then he would take the vaccine, since in that

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case the risk from the vaccine would be lessthan that from catching the disease elsewhere; but he says he wouldn't take the vaccine because polio is very rare now in the greater part of the world. He claims that what little polio there is, is mostly caused by this live-virus vaccine! I should have asked him why they don't go back to the old Salk vaccine (which is made with dead virus and therefore safe) if the oral vaccine is risky, but it didn't occur to me at the time.

But I must add that this doctor seemed to be a little confused about this stuff. He at first said that the first vaccine, the one injected with a needle, was the "Sabin" vaccine. Later when I mentioned the Salk vaccine he corrected himself and said that was the injected vaccine. He also said the first oral polio vaccine came out in 1974, but that is not true, because I remember quite distinctly when we had that oral vaccine. I was 21 years old at the time, which means the year was 1963.

This doesn't necessarily mean the guy is a quack — I don't suppose a doctor can be expected to remember the detailed history of every medicine — but it does mean that he did have a lapse of memory. Thus it's possible he may have also had lapses of memory connected with some of the other information he gave me.

So I think it would be highly advisable to get a second opinion on this stuff about immunizations for Mexico. If you want to consult a doctor about it, I wouldn't ask Langreder if I were you. I don't think he is a

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good doctor or that he even has confidence in his own medical ability. I'll bet he would just parrot whatever is the public health department's standard line on the subject. Whoever you consult, you might also ask him about this polio vaccine business, and try to perceive whether he is just parroting the standard official line because it is the "safe" thing to say, or whether he is giving a reasoned opinion.

Trozo español: Lo siguiente se saca de A History of the German Language, de John T. Waterman, University of Washington Press, 1966, págs. 135-136.

"Lo más notable, empero, cuando se juzga por las normas de la 'alta edad media', [High Medieval era] era el hecho de que el dominante tono estético de los Siglos XV y XVI fuese casi increíblemente crudo y grosero[1]. En verdad, se inventó un 'patrono' particular de la grosería[1], San Grobianus, para servir de símbolo característico de la época. ... Los teólogos de la edad tampoco tenían reparos en injuriarse unos a otros en un lenguaje que hoy día asociamos sólo con la porqueriza[2] o la cuneta[3]...."

—Ted

[1] I have translated "vulgar" and "vulgarity" as "grosero" and "grosería", but I think these Spanish terms are less specific than our "vulgar", "vulgarity", so I'll state here that obscene language is meant. Perhaps I should have used "obsceno", "obscenidad".

[2,3] I have translated "barnyard" and "gutter" as "porqueriza" and "cuneta" respectively, but I don't know if these words have in Spanish the same figurative meanings as "barnyard" and "gutter". But I trust you get the idea.

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